

A Zimbabwean Perspective on South Africa

(presented at the Strategies for Change conference).

WE all know the hidden hand behind progress towards Namibian independence and peace in Angola belongs to United States Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Chester Crocker.

But we're all dead wrong.

In the view of Zimbabwean Eddie Cross, managing director of the Beira Corridor Group, the true shaper of our sub-continental destiny is none other than Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev — and his interventions in the coming year will profoundly influence development within South Africa itself.

Far from being a harbinger of doom, said Cross, this fact allowed for "more optimism about Southern Africa than at any time since 1948".

Cross, a Rhodesian who was detained under the Smith regime and is now a confidante of Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe, made the intriguing claim in an address to the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa's "Strategies for Change" conference in Johannesburg last weekend.

In the speech, a remorseless indictment of white South Africans, Cross attacked those who dismiss the role of the international community in the process of change. "There have been dramatic changes in the West and East," he said, "and particularly in the Soviet Union. Moscow's foreign policy has altered, make no mistake.

"The real power player over Angola/Namibia has been Gorbachev, not Crocker. Gorbachev has moved the Soviet view away from support for violent change towards negotiation, and he has been in direct communication with Pretoria."

As a result, Cross predicts, "we are about to see the Gorbachev-Bush-Thatcher shuffle on South Africa.

"There will be a big power summit in the new year with South Africa high on the agenda. Then, for the first time, Pretoria will feel the combined weight of the West and East to make a deal. Pretoria is going to be driven to a solution."

SHAUN JOHNSON (Weekly Mail)

The intervention would far outweigh all other factors in the lengthy struggle between state and resistance in South Africa, said Cross. And he compared South Africa's situation to the Zimbabwean experience — "from which you (South Africans) are not learning any lessons.

"What changed Zimbabwe was the simple fact that (US Secretary of State) Henry Kissinger, with the help of SA Prime Minister John Vorster, put a Magnum to Smith's head. Now the Soviets have just done the same to the Angolans.

"Their softer policy on South Africa — a tentative acceptance of the need for the protection of minority interests, for example — will in fact give Pretoria a breathing space and, if used properly, will open a window of opportunity which must not be squandered."

Cross claimed Moscow's attitude-shift was underscored recently by the "extraordinary fact that the Soviet foreign ministry felt the need to reassure the ANC that they were not abandoning them."

According to Cross's scenario, the agendas of the superpowers as well as Britain and her European allies are in harmony for the first time — and could translate into an irresistible force.

From Pretoria's point of view, he said, a response required swift eco-

nomie restructuring towards an "open market with crash manpower training programmes", significant "social and political change" and, critically, a spelt-out "vision of the future".

Cross said profound changes in the world economy, primarily "a move away from the commodity producers", meant that "South Africa's prosperity is as thin as a wafer.

"You're always saying South Africa is Africa's one success story — in fact you're just one of Africa's disasters. You, as a country, are heading nowhere."

Describing South Africa's economy as "inefficient and unproductive" and the recent local surcharge on imported goods as a "testament to failure", Cross said the only solution was the intensive development of human resources. This was a fundamental world trend and would affect the South African political struggle more than any other dynamics, he argued.

The South African government had no choice to respond to economic forces and to intensifying international outrage, said Cross. This meant a shift away from reliance on the "total onslaught" theory, and the "horrendous, systematic destruction of neighbouring economies, destabilisation which reached a peak in the period 1981 to 1984".

As evidence of this shift, he cited "crucial growth in trade between South Africa and the frontline states, which will approach US\$300-million by the end of the year. Pretoria has the prospect of enjoying regional hegemony" if it plays its cards correctly, said Cross. "This may not be very comforting to us in Zimbabwe but it is acceptable to both the East and the West, and it will allow us at least some economic life."

He believed internal battles between South Africa's "military" and "external affairs" approaches had now been won by the latter. "There are still military hawks," he claimed, "but we think the battle has been won. This will yield substantial political and economical developments for South Africa."



Mr Eddie Cross

KEITH WATTRUS